



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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Ref No: HRDA/NE/TRP/09/09/2020

September 18, 2020

To
Mr. CS Mawri,
National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Assistant Registrar,
National Human Rights Commission,
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA, New Delhi –110 023
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert-India – Urgent Appeal for Action – Tripura: Brutal physical assault on journalist Mr. Parashar Biswas by unknown assailants for being critical of the Tripura CM

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert -India!

HRD Alert-India is a forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are writing to express our grave concern over the brutal physical assault on journalist Mr. Parashar Biswas by unknown persons, which was carried out within 24 hours of the Chief Minister of Tripura, Mr. Biplab Deb, threatening the state journalists. Mr. Biswas was attacked for his Facebook post critical of the CM for threatening journalists.

About the Human Rights Defender:

Mr. Parashar Biswas is a journalist with a Bengali daily, Syandan Patrika, in Tripura. He has been active in reporting public issues and has often been critical of the state government's performance on issues of public interest.

Source of the Information:

HRDA North-East Regional Coordinator

Media Reports

The Perpetrators:

The perpetrators are unknown and were masked. However, they threatened the journalist and asked him to refrain from posting any further critical comments on his Facebook. Thus, it is suspected they are supporters of the Tripura CM.

Date of Incident:

September 12, 2020

Place of Incident:

Ambassa, Dhalai District, Tripura

Background:

On September 11, 2020, the Chief Minister of Tripura, Mr. Biplab Deb, in a statement 'threatened' to take action against media houses and journalists for 'misreporting' on Covid-19 pandemic and also for 'spreading fake news'.

On September 12, 2020, Mr. Biswas made a video criticizing CM's threat to the media and posted on his Facebook page. In the video Mr. Biswas said, *"I would like to warn the Chief Minister that he should not try to threaten the media. Today I am posting this. There will be many others in future."* Mr. Biswas made this video while at COVID-19 care centre in his home town of Ambassa, since he had contracted COVID-19 while on duty.

Details of the Incident:

Mr. Biswas was discharged from Covid Centre on September 12, 2020, around 7:30 pm and he reached his house around 8:00 pm, where he stays alone. At around 11:30-11:45 pm while he was sleeping, some people banged his door and kicked it hard, breaking the door latch and entering forcibly. Around 6 -7 person wearing masks and helmets barged into his room and started assaulting him with fists and slaps. Then they dragged him out from his room and started beating him with bricks and stones outside.

One assailant warned him that if he posted comments on Facebook again they will return. When neighbours started coming out hearing the commotion, they ran away in the dark. Some people phoned the police and fire service and Mr. Biswas was taken to Dholai District Hospital by fire service escorted by police. He had injuries on his back, neck and head. He was discharged from the hospital and was recommended that he go to the capital city, Agartala, for further medical check-up since there is no MRI facility in his small town.

On September 13, 2020, an FIR (no. 42/20) was filed in the Ambassa Police station under the sections 325/ 447/341/34 of the IPC but no action had been taken on the FIR till date.

According to Mr. Biswas, there are many journalists under threat by the present state government of Tripura and the NHRC must pay special attention to their safety. It is to be noted that the Tripura journalists body has also criticised CM's statement against journalists and expressed concern at the number of journalists being assaulted after the statement by the CM.

This assault of Mr. Biswas is not only a criminal act, but an action to prevent a journalist from their right to dissent against a public official. Our Constitution gives journalists the right to exercise freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 (a) of the Indian Constitution which is crucial to the work of HRDs, including journalists. The right to freedom of expression encompasses three different aspects: 1) the right to hold opinions without interference; 2) the right of access to information; and 3) the right to impart information and ideas of all kind. On the aforesaid it is stated that Declaration on Human Rights Defenders seeks to protect the monitoring and advocacy functions of defenders by recognizing their right to obtain and disseminate information relevant to the enjoyment of human rights. If journalists are physically assaulted when they criticise politicians and public officials, seldom journalists will dare to take a stand and the fourth pillar of the democracy will be crushed further.

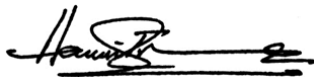
Appeal:

We appeal to the NHRC to treat this as a case of reprisal against a human rights defender for exercising his fundamental rights guaranteed through Article 19 of the Indian Constitution and malafide actions by suspected state sponsored machineries. Thereby, we urge the NHRC to –

- Direct the independent wing of the NHRC to initiate an immediate, independent, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the physical assault of journalist Mr. Parashar Biswas as a result of him being critical of the Tripura CM Mr. Biplab Deb.
- Direct the Director General of Police of Tripura to provide security to Mr. Parashar Biswas from any reprisals by known and unknown elements.
- Direct the Chief Secretary of Tripura to provide an interim compensation to Mr. Parashar Biswas for the physical and mental agony he is undergoing.
- Direct the Government of Tripura to ensure the physical safety of all journalists in the state who are under risk of reprisals from the perpetrators and provide a re-assurance of not engaging in such threats against the journalists.
- Direct the Chief Secretary of Tripura to create a safe atmosphere conducive to journalists and HRDs in the state.

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henri Tiphagne', with a horizontal line underneath it.

(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary